Committee on Resources

Testimony

Subcommittee on Water and Power
Thursday, July 17, 1997
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STATEMENT OF GORDON P. EATON, DIRECTOR, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER
OF THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE
JULY 17, 1997

I appreciate this opportunity for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to discuss with members of Congress our early plans and accomplishments under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). We welcome interaction with Congress on GPRA activities as we work together to set goals and establish evaluation criteria for our programs.

In your letter of invitation to the Secretary, you expressed interest in having us discuss the following four topics:

1. The unique responsibilities of the USGS as opposed to those of other government entities.

2. The extent to which USGS is coordinating with other agencies in developing its Strategic Plan.

3. The process being used to involve customers and other interested groups.

4. The planned schedule for Congressional consultations.

I will consider each of these topics in turn, particularly as they apply to our Water Resources Division. But before doing so, I'd like to share with the Subcommittee some background information about the USGS strategic planning efforts, in general, and GPRA planning in particular.

In June 1996, the Geological Survey concluded an 18-month strategic planning effort with the publication of the Strategic Plan for the U.S. Geological Survey: 1996 to 2005. The document was the product of what evolved, during the 18 months, into a joint effort between the 22-person strategic planning team that represented the geographic, organizational and functional diversity of the Geological Survey, and the Survey's senior management. The June 1996 document provided both a vision and a mission statement, but did not provide statements of goals and objectives as contemplated by GPRA. The plan anticipated, but did not fully address, the Congressionally mandated merger of the National Biological Service (NBS) with the Geological Survey.

Because of the need to address the requirements of GPRA and the merger with NBS, the Survey enhanced its strategic planning effort in April 1996 that resulted in a February 1997 draft Strategic Plan for the U.S. Geological Survey: 1997 to 2005. The revised document is being used for review within the Department and OMB and as a basis for consultation with Congress. The revised plan carries forward much of what was in

the June 1996 publication but adds goals and objectives, and addresses the programs of the NBS, which became the Survey's Biological Resources Division on October 1, 1996. That document has been revised as of June 1997 to reflect comments provided to us by departmental staff and through preliminary consultations with Congressional staff, including this Subcommittee.

While the strategic planning efforts were in progress, the U.S. Geological Survey also participated in the pilot phase of the implementation of GPRA by conducting a performance plan pilot project of the National Water-Quality Assessment (NAWQA) Program. Through this early experience, we learned that:

- The discipline of GPRA requires an agency to anticipate future program plans and budget proposals throughout the GPRA process. Specifically, an agency needs to consider the kinds of proposals it will make in out-year annual performance plans while it is developing its strategic plan.

- It is possible for different measures of success to have different significance depending on the interests and perspectives of reviewers. For example, accountants might be concerned with the average cost per water quality sample while program managers might be concerned with the number of study units that are underway or completed. Demographers and policy officials might be concerned with the percentage of the U.S. population that is covered by water quality assessments and whether water quality is improving or getting worse, both locally and nationally.

- For performance plans, performance measures, and critical results to produce desired outcomes, there must be an ongoing communication between performers and reviewers, and among the various reviewers. The communication helps bring the performer much closer to widely recognized success and helps reviewers agree on what success looks like.

While we feel we've made progress, it has been a significant challenge for the USGS, as a science agency, to develop results-oriented performance measures that will allow ourselves and others to determine whether goals are being met. We are not unique in this experience and it is a topic that continues to be discussed in an interagency Research Round Table that is composed of staff of Federal science agencies. We find that we are joined by other science agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the Army Research Laboratory, and the Agricultural Research Service in having difficulty in developing measures that can be used to measure progress on an annual basis. There are several difficulties:

- In most cases, a minimum of 5 years is needed to realize "outcomes" from research, though some research might not yield results for 10 to 20 years.

- Because of the nature of science, we cannot anticipate whether research will be successful, or the extent to which information generated from the research will be used, or what the outcomes or "results" of the use of the information might be.

- Often, a single research project can support multiple objectives and yield results that were not anticipated or even conceived of when the project was first embarked upon.

With this information as background, let me now turn to the Subcommittee's four specific areas of interest.

1. The unique responsibilities of the USGS define its mission. This mission can be summarized as providing the Nation with reliable, impartial information to describe and understand the Earth. This information is used by others to:

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- minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters;
- manage water, biological, energy, and mineral resources;
- enhance and protect the quality of life; and
- contribute to wise economic and physical development.

Within this overall mission of the USGS, the mission of the Water Resources Division (WRD) is to provide reliable, impartial, timely information needed to understand the Nation's water resources. WRD actively promotes the use of this information by decision makers to:

Minimize the loss of life and property as a result of water related natural hazards such as floods, droughts, and land movement.

- Effectively manage ground-water and surface-water resources for domestic agriculture, commercial, municipal, industrial, recreational, and ecological uses.
- Protect and enhance water resources for human health, aquatic health, and environmental quality.
- Contribute to wise physical and economic development of the Nation's resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Consistent with its mission, WRD collects and manages high quality hydrologic data. WRD activities include data collection, assessments of water resources, and applied and basic research and development with the purpose of solving water-related problems.

In summary, the Water Resources Division of USGS is a primary source of scientific information on one of the Nation's most important natural resources--water. This responsibility fulfills a unique Federal role by providing standardized, objective information for the entire country through long-term hydrologic data, interpretive reports, and new analytical methods. OMB Memorandum 92-01 designates USGS as the lead Federal agency in coordinating water information activities among all levels of government and the private sector. The USGS has the primary responsibility for coordinating water data activities in the Federal Government. Because river basins and aquifers cross many jurisdictional boundaries there is great efficiency in having one national agency, the USGS, provide standardized regional water information to all interested groups through cost-sharing arrangements. In addition, because many water issues involve interjurisdictional disputes, it is very important that the data and conclusions be viewed as credible by all parties involved. This includes adjudication of water rights within a State, among States, or at international boundaries. The USGS is accepted as a credible source by parties involved in disputes.

2. The USGS has been very active historically in coordinating with other agencies. As mentioned previously, OMB Memorandum 92-01 designates USGS as the lead Federal agency in coordinating water information activities. The newly formed Advisory Committee on Water Information, convened by the USGS, brings together 35 water resource organizations at the Federal, State, and local levels of government, as well as representatives from the private sector, universities, and public-interest groups. Through its reimbursable and collaborative programs with numerous Federal agencies, the USGS has many opportunities to interact with these agencies in developing priorities for work that address real-world issues.

These contacts provide an acute awareness of current and future needs for water information that is reflected in the USGS Strategic Plan.

One example of this process is the Watershed and River System Management Program, a cooperative venture between the USGS and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). The Program is providing integrated computer modeling capability for managing the varied demands for water in arid watersheds in the Western U.S. The Program supports the development and application of data-based decision support systems assisting resource managers at Federal, State, and local levels in achieving an efficient allocation of water among competing interests. The USGS Strategic Plan addresses data collection, analysis and research to assist others in managing resource scarcity issues. As a result, a performance measure related directly to evaluating success of the watershed modeling work described above has been incorporated into our GPRA document.

In addition to programmatic interactions, the USGS has established a number of bilateral committees with other Federal agencies having a need for USGS information and products in order to better coordinate priorities and programs. Within the Department of the Interior, the USGS has established committees with the Office of Surface Mining, Bureau of Land Management, Minerals Management Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and Fish and Wildlife Service. Discussions are underway to form a similar committee with the National Park Service. Coordination committees have also been established with other agencies including the Defense Mapping Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Finally, under the leadership of the Office of Science Technology Policy, USGS and its Water Resources Division are active participants in the Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources.

More specifically related to GPRA, the USGS participates in the Interagency Research Roundtable and the Natural Resources Performance Management Forum--Federal agency groups sharing experiences in implementing GPRA. The Department of the Interior has established a Strategic Planning Steering Group to promote coordination among Interior's bureaus. Where appropriate we are involved with individual Federal agencies on GPRA-related activities of joint interest. For example, we are working with the Environmental Protection Agency on its "Environmental Goals for America With Milestones for 2005."

3. Regarding the process to involve customers and other interested groups, the USGS is very active in soliciting information on program plans and priorities from its stakeholders. The USGS conducts about two-thirds of its total water resources work in partnership with more than 1,100 local, State, and Federal land and water management agencies. These agencies are directly involved in determining the scope of effort in jointly funded data collection and interpretive studies and in reviewing plans and products. The USGS relies on these partnerships to identify emerging water resource issues and to assure that USGS water information is relevant to the needs of decision-makers at the local, State, and national level.

The overall direction of the remaining USGS water programs is also strongly influenced by stakeholders. For example, in the case of the National Water-Quality Assessment (NAWQA) Program, the Water Science and Technology Board of the National Research Council conducted a review of the NAWQA pilot program and provided suggestions which helped to revise the program's overall design and implementation. The Federal/non-Federal Advisory NAWQA Council helped to identify water-quality issues for the program and prioritize study units. Multi-organizational liaison committees at the study unit and national level provide another important mechanism for stakeholder interaction. To date, more than 2,000 representatives from Federal, State, and local management agencies along with Indian nations, universities, and citizens groups

have had an opportunity to provide input to the NAWQA Program.

With regard to soliciting specific feedback on the original USGS Strategic Plan published in May 1996, 1,200 copies were distributed nationwide, about 350 of which were sent to water related organizations, including:

State water management agencies
State soil and water conservation agencies
County planning boards
State offices of land and water
State geologists
County government agencies
Municipal agencies
State agencies responsible for abandoned mine lands
Universities
Commonwealth of Puerto Rico agencies
Corps of Engineers
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Department of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Energy
Non-governmental organizations such as the Nature Conservancy and American Crop Protection Association

4. Regarding Congressional consultations, the USGS has met on two occasions with the House GPRA Team for Interior--on April 25 and May 2. As you know, this team includes representatives from this Subcommittee, the Energy and Minerals Subcommittee, the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight and the Budget Committee. We received valuable contributions to our GPRA document on both occasions. In addition, copies of the USGS draft Strategic Plan have been sent to majority and minority staff for the appropriate committees in both the House and Senate. The Department has offered further consultations with the House and is prepared to meet with the Senate. We are anxious for constructive interaction from both houses of Congress so that our revised GPRA plan will be ready to submit to the Congress by September 30. We recognize that making GPRA work effectively requires the combined efforts of the Bureau, the Administration, and the Congress. The USGS is an eager and active participant in this process, Mr. Chairman, and we appreciate your strong interest in GPRA.

I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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